

# **Forum on Crime Prevention for Asian Pacific Islander Senior Citizens**

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## ***Meeting Summary***



*Deputy Charles Douglas, Transit Police, shares crime prevention tips.*

### **Introduction & Background Information**

On Thursday, December 9, 2004, Seattle City Councilmembers held a community forum in response to a rash of strong-armed robberies against Asian Pacific Islander (API) senior citizens in Southeast Seattle. Since June 2004, 65 strong-armed robberies were reported in the southeast area. These attacks and/or injuries to older victims present increased problems in recovery and healing. Fear engendered by these attacks could be as debilitating as the injuries, causing the victim to be fearful of every noise and every stranger on the street.

The purpose of the forum was to: bring attention to these robberies, understand how law enforcement respond to such robberies; hear citizens' concerns; answer citizens' questions; and share ideas to prevent future strong-armed robberies.

In response to this series of robberies, Seattle police officers coordinated with detectives, crime prevention coordinators, 911 operators, Transit Police officers and community leaders during the summer and early fall. SPD also formed a one-time task team that flooded the southeast area and made eight arrests, resulting in six charges. With these individuals in custody, the number of reported robberies is down to a trickle. Community outreach staff, who prepared interpretive resources and language media, was also invaluable. SPD staff indicated that these robberies were not coordinated, not gang-related, and no racial targeting or hate crimes were involved.

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To notify the community, SPD staff organized the following outreach:

- Staff issued a mini press release on September 30<sup>th</sup> targeting the South Seattle area, including NW Asian Weekly and Beacon Hill News;
- Staff notified block watch captains via e-mail; and
- Southeast Crime Prevention Council leaders reached out to local churches and community centers.

### **Crime Prevention Tips**

Crime prevention staff shared the following tips:

- When traveling, carry only what is needed, not everything;
- Separate identification cards from house keys;
- Take positive control of your items by wrapping your purse around your shoulder and keeping track of personal items at all times;
- Report all incidents; and
- Remember that personal safety is more important than what is in a bag.

When using the bus, Transit Police recommended the following tips:

- Locate your money before getting on/off the bus;
- Be aware of people bumping into you;
- Let passengers exit first, then board the bus;
- Do not fall asleep in the bus;
- If you feel uncomfortable, change seats or go to the bus driver, who has a silent alarm; and
- Remember that after 7 PM, passengers must enter/exit through the front door. There is also a “Night Stop Service” between 9 PM and 5 AM where passengers can ask bus drivers to stop at a certain location that is more convenient or closer to home/work.

### **Suggestions for Improving Crime Prevention**

The following is a list of suggestions for preventing future strong-armed robberies.

- **Improve communication and outreach.** Citizens felt that the City needs to improve communication and outreach, including **posting flyers translated in multiple languages** at bus stops, community centers, senior centers, churches, and stores. Police staff offered to collect names of organizations to help spread the word. Effective use of the media, such as newspapers, would help increase awareness. Councilmembers were encouraged to schedule coffee hours and safety walks in the community.

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- **Focus on the importance of partnership** between the city government, police staff, transit authorities, crime prevention individuals and community leaders.
- **Increase visibility and responsiveness of police officers** in the streets. The City could consider a bond measure to increase bike patrols.
- **Increase your awareness and visibility** where you live, shop, and work. Know your neighbors and be the eyes and ears for your community. Potential offenders need to know that neighbors are watching. The City should isolate and identify blocks, streets, and times of day and **organize safety walks**.
- **Contact the police**, whether it is to report a crime or to provide information about a crime. Do not be intimidated if English is a second language; translators are available.
- Continue to **build on existing crime prevention programs**, such as block watch programs and crime advisory councils. Consider clustering block watches and advisory councils to improve communication and awareness.
- Apply for **neighborhood matching funds** through the Department of Neighborhoods (DON) for supporting additional meetings, where ideas for crime prevention could be developed.
- City staff should, with help from the community leaders, **educate people about different ways to call 911**. For instance, each call can either be standard, no contact (when you request SPD staff not to contact you) or anonymous. Prepare crime prevention brochures translated in different languages to educate new immigrants.
- It is OK to call 911 if a stranger knocks on your door and does not go away. Police staff confirmed that police operators prioritize these calls from the elderly, even if no crime is currently in progress.
- **Understand the nature of the crime**. At the Public Safety Committee, executive staff will report back on the following: status of crime in Othello Park and Henderson/Rainier area which have been problems for a long time and information about the demographics of these crimes and where they occur citywide.

### **Challenges in Crime Prevention**

- The City needs to achieve a balance between early notification and the potential for community panic;
- The City must keep citywide safety in mind, while increasing police visibility in problem areas;
- Offenders will be back on the streets after going through the courts and serving their time;

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- According to police staff, it does not matter how many officers patrol the streets. Involvement and awareness of community members are needed to keep on top of these crimes; and
- Many new immigrants are intimidated by law enforcement. They are either afraid of retaliation or are hesitant because they do not understand or speak English fluently. At the meeting, community members were assured that SPD is not corrupted. SPD staff is there to help and assist everybody.

### **Next Steps**

City Councilmembers pledged to bring safety back to the community and emphasized the importance of partnership between the community and law enforcement staff. SPD staff and crime prevention individuals have worked very hard to respond to these heinous crimes. However, based on the information and suggestions raised at the meeting, not everybody feels completely safe. In response, Councilmember Godden added, “We may not feel safer but we are better informed and that’s a start.”

Through the **Public Safety Committee**, which is chaired by Councilmember Nick Licata and vice-chaired by Councilmember David Della, Council will work with executive staff to follow through with the suggestions and ideas raised at the forum. According to Councilmember Della, **“Together, we will take our community back.”**

### **ATTENDEES:**

**Councilmembers:** David J. Della, Jean Godden, Nick Licata, Richard J. McIver & Tom Rasmussen

**Seattle Police Dept:** Assistant Chief Harry Bailey, Lieutenant James Koutsky, Lieutenant Landy Black, Detective Rick Bourns, Mark Solomon, & Linh Thach

**Dept of Neighborhoods:** Yvonne Sanchez, Director; Steve Louie, Beacon Hill Neighborhood Service Coordinator; & Glenn Harris, Southeast Seattle Neighborhood Service Coordinator

**Transit Police:** Major Carol Cummings, Captain Nathan Elledge & Deputy Charles Douglas

**Community Reps:** Alan Lai, Chinese Information & Service Center & Mariana Quarnstrom, Southeast Crime Prevention Council

**Legislative Aides:** Neil Powers (CM Peter Steinbrueck), Elaine Ko (CM Richard Conlin) & Elma Borbe (CM Della)